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WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26, 2009

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In Today's Papers

Basbug: Government Must Take Economic, Social Measures To Beat Terror

Media outlets report the Chief of the military General Staff (TGS) General Ilker Basbug said in a statement posted on the TGS webpage that Turkey was a "unitary state," and that Turkish was the official language of the country. The message was posted on the occasion of August 30 Victory Day. Basbug made it clear that Turkish military would not engage in any activity that might lead to direct or indirect contact with the terrorist PKK or its supporters. Papers note the statement came after the criticism raised by the opposition on the latest National Security Council (MGK) declaration which backed the government's "democratization package" that aims to address the Kurdish question.

In response to the criticism that came from the opposition and the media that the MGK declaration was a "tacit approval of holding contacts with the Kurdish DTP," Basbug said TSK would not accept "those who enjoy the privileges of the democratic system" (i.e., the pro-Kurdish DTP) showing tolerance to the terrorists who target innocent civilians." Basbug stressed the Turkish military was "a side" when it came to the defense of the nation state and its unitary structure. "While the army continues its fight against the terrorist organization, it is important for the government to take measures in economic, social and cultural areas in order to eradicate terrorism," said Basbug. On the "democratization package" of the government, Basbug said the right to freely discuss issues should not contain elements that could jeopardize the existence of the state, or drive Turkey toward separation.

Reactions to Basbug's Statement

Papers report the ruling AKP deputy group chief Bekir Bozbag said Basbug's message was "positive." Bozbag commented that the constitution has its "red lines" concerning the extent of possible reforms. Bozbag noted the TGS Chief's message was directed both toward the government and the opposition. Opposition CHP deputy group chief Kemal Anadol said that in his message concerning the

Kurdish initiative, General Basbug emphasized important points, but expressed regret that such sensitivity was not seen at the MGK meeting. MHP deputy group chairman Mehmet Sandir said Basbug's remarks on the Kurdish initiative were positive. Sandir said, "He declared what is obvious. With this statement, the government's Kurdish initiative is over -- insistence on its continuation would be tantamount to separatism." Kurdish party DTP deputy group chairmen Gulden Kisanak and Selahattin Demirtas issued a statement in reaction to the statements of Basbug and the AKP's Bekir Bozdag. The DTP statement said Basbug and Bozbag's remarks show that the 'Kurdish initiative' is "not anything outside the official rhetoric."

Editorial Commentary on the TGS Statement/Kurdish Issue

Mustafa Unal wrote in Islamist-oriented/intellectual Zaman: Opposition parties CHP and MHP exerted extra efforts to pull the military into the field of debates over the government's Kurdish initiative. They successfully provoked the military and forced them to speak. Chief of General Staff General Basbug, as a custom, was going to talk during the "Victory week", anyway. Bahceli and Baykal were definitely aware of the timing. General Basbug, in order to respond the accusations by CHP, MHP and DTP, adjust the timing of his speech to an earlier time. Usually these speeches are not limited with the great Victory but usually cover the issues on the regime, secularism and other sensitive issues. This time, all his messages were referring to the government's Kurdish initiative. Both opposition parties CHP and MHP were satisfied with General Basbug's messages and they said that the Turkish General Staff (TGS) was objecting the government's opening. AKP deputy Bozdag, however, said "Basbug declared that the opening is a state policy." Who is right? As a matter of fact, Basbug's words on the constitution's unchangeable principles, are not any different than the words of the

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architects of the initiative, President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan. They all say "single state, single nation, single flag and single homeland." Even though the military is not completely out of it but, the democratic opening is mainly an issue for the politics. Maybe it is not possible for the CHP and the MHP to pursue politics without the military, but this is not possible in the democracies. They have to be contented with the speech only."

Mehmet Barlas wrote in mainstream Sabah: "Once again, General Basbug directed the politics. If the opposition parties had said the same things as Basbug, the government would be very angry but just because the direction came from the military, the same government said "our opinions match, besides, our constitution has already determined all these red lines." There is this general belief in Turkey that the civilians cannot determine the important issues of the politics. Now, following the TGS statement, the spokespersons of the opposition parties can be listened."

Sami Kohen wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "Turkey should not miss the opportunity now to resolve the Kurdish issue. This issue created serious problems for Turkey in foreign politics, especially in the relationship with its allies and neighbors, for years. If the issue is resolved through this democratic move, Turkey will be revived in this arena also and moreover, a solution will open the doors for Turkey as a regional power."

Can Atakli wrote in mainstream Vatan: "With yesterday's statement, the TGS gave the message that other than the red lines, they will not object to the Kurdish initiative. If the government pays attention to this kindness and evaluates the opening within this framework, the tensions in the country will decrease and the military will be saved from unfair accusations. "

Murat Yetkin wrote in liberal Radikal: "If the Kurdish initiative, which is referred as 'the state project' by the interior minister Besir Atalay, is controlled by President Gul above the level of the political parties, it will ease the tension of PM Erdogan. The government, should accept the fact that at this point, their interlocutor is the CHP because this is the natural way of politics. Therefore, Erdogan should soon change his methods before the public starts thinking that the solution will not be reached again."

DTP To Announce Ocalan's 'Roadmap' September 1
Media outlets report that on September 1 World Peace Day, Kurdish party DTP will hold a rally in Diyarbakir, to which one million people are expected to join. DTP's Diyarbakir provincial head Firat Anli said that on the same day, the DTP plans to make public a "roadmap" outlined by the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan for the resolution of the Kurdish question.

U.S. To Deport PKK's Parlak (Hurriyet)
Mainstream Hurriyet reports the Federal Appeals Court in Cincinnati approved the "deportation" of Ibrahim Parlak, a Turk suspected of being a PKK member, who has resided in the U.S. since 1991. Parlak allegedly did not declare his ties with the PKK during his Green Card application in 1993. He was convicted of being involved in the killing of two Turkish soldiers, and a served prison sentence in Turkey. Senator Carl Levin and Representative Fred Upton have submitted a bill for Parlak to be given Green Card, according to Hurriyet.

Friends of Pakistan Meeting
Media hail yesterday's meeting in Istanbul of the Friends of A Democratic Pakistan as establishing a "Marshall Plan" for the country. Mainstream Sabah headlines, "Support to Pakistan Will Continue." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak headlines, "A Marshall Plan for Pakistan," and the paper reports, "The historic summit sought to provide support to the rebuilding of Pakistan after it has been ravaged by its war on terror." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet reports in "A Marshall Plan for Pakistan," that, "The Makaland Project seeks to rebuild (Pakistan) in order to re-establish

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stability after two million people were displaced by clashes with the Taliban."

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports Foreign Minister Davutoglu gave a harsh response to a question that Ankara's support to Islamabad depends on negotiations with the U.S. on Iraq, saying such comments were "extremely irrational," and that there was no need for a third country in order to improve ties with Pakistan. Leftist Taraf reports Holbrooke said in response to a question that every country would decide on its own regarding sending combat troops to Afghanistan. Mainstream Aksam reports Holbrooke said he spoke with President Karzai about the Taliban's young recruits at the age of 13-14. "If he's reelected," said Holbrooke, "Karzai said he would place among his priorities a general amnesty for young Taliban militants."

Holbrooke on NTV
Media note Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan Richard Holbrooke spoke with NTV last night regarding the NATO operations in Afghanistan; most note Holbrooke refused to compare Turkey's current Kurdish Initiative to the situation in the former Yugoslavia prior to its breakup. Mainstream Haberturk reports, "Holbrooke: Turkey Cannot Be A Second Yugoslavia," and the article notes, "Holbrooke, the architect of the plan to bring peace to Bosnia-Herzegovina by dividing it up into independent states," said, "Turkey does not compare to Yugoslavia." The paper notes that Turkish opposition CHP Leader Deniz Baykal recently criticized the government's plan to address Turkey's Kurdish issue by saying "Turkey could turn into a former Yugoslavia." Mainstream Hurriyet carries the front page headline, "There Is No Comparison Between Turkey and Yugoslavia," and the article notes U.S diplomat Richard Holbrooke said at a meeting at the Ciragan Palace in Istanbul, "Former Yugoslavia was founded when the Treaty of Versailles was signed following World War I. Too many diverse peoples were put in one place (in Yugoslavia). Turkey is a great country founded by the great leader Ataturk. There are no similarities." A Documented Torture Confession from The CIA (Haberturk)
Mainstream Hurriyet headlines, "A Super Prosecutor for The CIA," and the paper calls U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder's newly appointed special prosecutor John Durham, "a super prosecutor." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports, "The CIA Torture Report Is Published Censored," as "The administration has begun a debate on the treatment of terror suspects," and "Dick Cheney reacted to the report." Liberal Radikal notes, "Obama Bludgeons the CIA," as

"Cheney charges Obama with putting the country at risk."
Islamist-oriented Zaman reports, "The Investigation Into the CIA Angers Cheney." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet headlines, "An Independent Prosecutor Investigates The CIA," and the article notes, "Attorney General Eric Holder has announced an investigation into whether the treatment of terror suspects violated laws," as "the report indicates interrogators threatened to kill children," of some suspects.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- On Wednesday, President Gul and Prime Minister Erdogan will hold separate meetings with Robert Wexler, visiting co-chair of the U.S. Senate Turkey Friendship Group.
- Culture Minister Ertugrul Gunay said there were no plans to pardon the PKK's imprisoned leader Abdullah Ocalan.
- Deputy Prime Minister Ali Babacan expressed concern about the gapping budget deficit, and warned that Turkey needs to "tighten its belt."
- Batman governor Ahmet Turhan has recruited Kurdish-speaking bodyguards to boost dialogue with local people in the province of Batman.

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- The Health Ministry has decided to close down a special smoking section which was opened at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport.
- Istanbul Municipality is restoring the 178-year old St. Dimitrios Church in Silivri district so that it can be converted into a mosque.

World

- Iraq and Syria recalled their ambassadors in a diplomatic crisis sparked by Iraqi accusations that Damascus is sheltering insurgents who carried out last week's truck bombings in Baghdad that killed 101 people.
- Taliban commander Waliur Rehman said the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, Baitullah Mehsud, has died of injuries sustained in a U.S. missile strike earlier this month.
- Eight people are killed in a huge blast in the Afghan city of Kandahar. The blast is caused by five car bombs strung together.
- President Obama nominates Ben Bernanke for a second four-year term as the head of the Federal Reserve.
- South Korea attempts to complete its first space launch today, a week after aborting the mission minutes before liftoff because a technical malfunction.

JEFFREY